C H U R C H N E W S

F R O M T H E N O R T H E R N C O U N T R I E S

Edited by the Northern Ecumenical Institute

Sigtuna, Sweden

Director: Dr. Harry Johansson, Sigtuna, Sweden

Editor: Rev. Johs. Langhoff, Øster Egesborg per Mern, Denmark

No. 4 March 25th, 1955.

Northern Conference for Lawyers and Theologians.

A meeting in Copenhagen has planned the programme for a conference to be held towards the end of August at the institute of Järvenpää, Finland, to which lawyers and theologians from all the Northern countries are invited. The conference is to deal with current problems in modern jurisprudence viewed in the light of the Christian faith. Especially three subjects are to be discussed: "The problems of positivism", "Justice, society, and the individual", and actual problems connected with the marriage laws.

The conferense which is arranged by the Northern Ecumenical Institute is to be attended by 10 members from each of the Northern countries, half of whom are to be theologians and half lawyers.

Northern Home Missions Conference.

The Scandinavian Council for Home Missions decided at a meeting of the executive committee in Copenhagen to try to hold a Scandinavian Home Mission Conference in Oslo in September, 1956. The conference will be the 7th inter-Scandinavian meeting.

DENMARK

Christian Christiansen Returns to the Near East.

Mr. Christian Christiansen who (as mentioned in CN No. 2) was attacked in Jerusalem on December 26th by an Arab worker dismissed from the Victoria Hospital, and who was flown to Denmark for a necessary operation, is now fully recovered and

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has returned to his work as leader of the Lutheran relief work among refugees in the Near East.

Together with Mr. Christiansen travelled the former manager of the YMCA Mission to Soldiers in Denmark, Mr. Axel Christensen, who has been appointed managing director of the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem, and the deaconess, Sister Julie Kall, who is to be head nurse of the same hospital.

Since June 1953 gifts amounting to almost 2 million Danish Crowns ($ 262.000) including 100 tons of clothing and shoes, have been sent from Denmark to the Arab refugees, and during his stay in Denmark Christian Christiansen again received gifts for his work from various quarters, for instance, enamel-ware valued at 13.000 Crowns from an enamel factory in Copenhagen, and more clothing is being collected in Mr. Christiansen's home town.

Church Protests Against Increase of Inheritance Tax.

In his search for possible means of increasing the State's income, the Danish Minister of Finance has suggested increasing the tax on legacies left to charitable institutions. However, protests have been made from several social institutions and also from the Church, where the "Joint Committee of National Church Organisations" representing most of the voluntary church work done in Denmark has sent an appeal to the Parliament.

The Minister of Finance has suggested that the increased tax on legacies should be used for an "Educational Youth Fund", but the Joint Committee does not think it reasonable to take money from useful charities and give it to another cause of public service.

Theological Licentiate to be Introduced.

Until now there has only been one theological degree in Denmark after the bachelor's degree: viz. the doctor's degree which is relatively rare. However, a plan for introducing a new degree has been submitted by the Federation of Young Clergymen and recommended by the theological faculties in Copenhagen and Aarhus and will soon take effect. The new degree, the theological licentiate, will be far less demanding than a doctorate.

The new degree will undoubtedly serve to stimulate young clergymen to continue their studies after entering upon their ministry.

Commemorative and Thanksgiving Services on May 4th.

All over Denmark commemorative and thanksgiving services will be held on May 4th, the tenth anniversary of Denmark's liberation. In most places these services will serve as an introduction to commemorative celebrations arranged by local societies and parish councils.

Correction.

It has been drawn to our attention that Ludwig Nommensen, the missionary for whom the Christian University on Sumatra is to be named, was of German extraction and not Danish as stated in CN No. 1. We deplore the error.

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Church Problems Awaiting Decision of Lutheran Union.

In his speech made [illegible] at the Synod Conference in Copenhagen, and more fully in the Danish edition of his book, Bishop Fuglsang Damgaard has declared that the Church Council will not be able to solve the problems which have been raised from the Church, where the Lutheran Union has been working, until the Union has decided its attitude to the proposals which have been put forward. The Union is to meet in December, and it is expected that the Church Council will be able to begin its work after that meeting.

Theological Degree to be Introduced.

Until now there has only been one theological degree in Denmark after the bachelor's degree, i.e. the doctor's degree, which has been awarded by the theological faculties as a result of a long course of study and research. The new degree will be far less demanding than a doctorate.

The new degree will undoubtedly serve to stimulate young clergymen to continue their studies after entering upon their ministry.

Commemorative and Thanksgiving Services on May 11th.

All over Denmark commemorative and thanksgiving services will be held on May 10th, the tenth anniversary of Denmark's liberation. In most places these services will serve as an introduction to commemorative celebrations arranged by local societies and parish councils.

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FINLAND

Finland's Orthodox Church to Remain under Constantinople.

At a recent meeting of Orthodox Priests, Dean Ryttyläinen emphasized the fact that the relations of the Finnish Orthodox Church with the Patriarchate of Constantinople were to remain unaltered.

It is a well-known fact that the Orthodox patriarch of Moscow has claimed several times in the last years that the Orthodox Church of Finland with its 70.000 members rightly belonged to the Patriarchate of Moscow, but having acknowledged the Patriarch of Constantinople as its head since 1923, the Church as a whole feels no desire for a change. Only two congregations in Helsinki and the monasteries Valamo and Konevitsa, in all about 1.000 people, have expressed any wish to have the Patriarch of Moscow as their religious leader. Last year the Russian Patriarch appointed the former professor from Leningrad Michael Tsub as their bishop.

New Diocese to be 800th Anniversary Gift to the Church?

A deputation from the diocese of Tampere under the leadership of Bishop Elis Gulin recently asked for an audience with the Finnish Prime Minister, requesting the Government to establish a new diocese in the Finnish National Church as a sort of anniversary gift to the Finnish Church, commemorating the fact that the first Christian crusade to Finland took place just 800 years ago. The episcopal residence would be in Helsinki, and the diocese would comprise the Finnish congregations in the capital and the rest of the province of Nyland.

Is it Right to Dance the Evening Before a Day of Prayer?

Just like Sweden Finland still has four official days of prayer and penitence every year, a tradition dating back to the 16th century. The days of prayer now fall on four Sundays, but in Finland their special character is emphasized by an edict prohibiting all amusements from 6 p.m. Saturday till 6 p.m. Sunday. And every year the Government issues an appeal inviting the citizens to take part in the services held on these days and to meditate at home on the eternal truths of Christianity.

Several debates in Parliament have dealt with suggestions for a partial repeal of the ban on amusements, the only exemptions from which having hitherto been those granted in special cases by the province government. But as yet no changes have been made.

The matter is at present being eagerly discussed once again in wide circles, one of the reasons being the assertion that the consumption of alcohol is larger on these Saturday evenings than on others and that there are more instances of disorderly conduct in the streets.

In some church quarters there is a feeling that the amusement ban should be modified because the Days of Prayer no longer have the significance they once had, while others wish to preserve

FINLAND

the tradition. A question put to the Government and signed by 11 members of Parliament representing different parties, maintains that it is reprehensible of a local government to have permitted dancing on one of these Saturday evenings.

Helsinki's Parish Registers to be Microfilmed.

In their budget for 1955 the Evangelical-Lutheran parishes in Helsinki have appropriated 3 million Finmarks for microfilming the parish registers from 1860 until the present day. The older parish registers have already been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of the Mormons in Utah which has presented copies to the parishes.

The main advantage of the new system is a tremendous saving of space, but in addition to this the films are far more durable than books.

NORWAY

The Norwegian Church Refuses Dissenters Permission to Give Religious Instruction in the Schools.

The demands of the dissenters (those who do not belong to the Norwegian Lutheran Church) for permission to give religious instruction in the State schools have so far been utterly rejected by all the church authorities that have given an opinion. Thus Bishop Eivind Berggrav who is one of the leading men in ecumenical work in Norway recently rejected the demands of the dissenters in a broadcast talk. "However much I should like to meet them halfway, I see no practicable way", he said. Representatives from the theological faculties and leaders of the big voluntary Christian organisations which play a great part in the religious life in Norway have likewise opposed any change. The decision lies in the hands of the Storting, but any attempt to comply with the demands of the dissenters will be met with vigorous protests from the National Church. Even though several radical politicians have gone further than the dissenters and demanded that religious instruction should be entirely non-confessional there is as yet nothing to indicate that the Government will support such a bill.

Recently the debate on religious instruction has become somewhat acrimonious and threatens to destroy the brotherly feelings that have developed between the Lutheran Church and the Free Churches since the War. The press and the leading men of the Free Churches have stated that they do not understand the viewpoint of the National Church and that they will demand "their democratic and civil rights" from the Storting although the Church opposes it.

The chief complaint of the dissenters is that the rule that bars them from giving religious instruction in the schools means that they generally cannot become teachers at all. The great majority of schools throughout the country have only one to two teachers and are therefore compelled to choose those who

can teach in all subjects. This has led to severe heart-searchings and several young members of the Free Churches with a vocation for teaching have had to go against their conscience and join the National Church in oder to enter upon the vocation of their choice. It is a fact that whereas dissenters who are ardent Christians are not allowed to give religious instruction, such instruction is given by many teachers whose relationship to the National Church is purely formal and who have no personal faith. It must be remembered that 96 o/o of the population belong to the National Church.

The Norwegian Church maintains that even though the religious instruction takes place in the schools, it is in reality the National Church's catechumenical instruction of its children. For this reason such instruction must adhere to the symbolic books. Children from the Free Churches are excused from attending the religious instruction of the schools, and just as the Lutherans would not dream of demanding the right to instruct Baptist children in religion. so the Baptists (or members of other Free Churches) should not demand the right to instruct Lutheran children. "If we give dissenters the right to instruct our children in the Christian truths,we should in the name of religious freedom have given one form of religion the right to undermine the other", Bishop Berggrav maintained in his broadcast talk. Like other church authorities Bishop Berggrav also pointed out that there were great practical difficulties. To give in to the demands of the dissenters would lead to confusion and chaos. For most of the dissenters do not belong to the large recognized denominations, such as the Methodists and Baptists, but to small locally organised groups, particularly the Pentecostal Movement and Jehovah's Witnesses. "Their convictions are often coloured by a fanaticism which it would be ill-advised to let loose on school-children."

The dissenters have said that they do not demand an undenominational school, but if they are accepted as teachers they are willing to teach according to the approved text-books. "But", says Bishop Berggrav, "this would mean that they would have to be accepted on trust, but is it right to say to a man that I trust him to betray his conviction?" Others have pointed out that it is their very disagreement with Luther's doctrines that has caused the dissenters to leave the Church.

The dissenters do not recognize the religious instruction of the schools as the catechumenical instruction of the Lutheran Church alone. The schools are not only schools for the National Church, but for society as a whole. The National Church is not appointed by the State to be trustee in school affairs. "As citizens of a free and democratic society we believe that we have the same right to obtain posts as teachers in all such subjects as members nominally belonging to the National Church", says Rev. Arthur Ekeberg of the Methodist Church. And the organ of the Norwegian Baptist Union, "The Banner", writes in a leading article: "It is almost comical to think of our 7.500 members on the warpath against the 96 o/o belonging to the National Church. It is not our object to force upon another denomination something it does not want, we only demand our full civic rights with regard to a social institution, such as the Norwegian School."

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Gifts to Foreign Missions Increased 10 o/o.

In a recently published financial statement for 1954 the Norwegian Missions Society shows a 10 o/o increase of income from gifts. In 1954 these gifts amounted to 5,9 million Norwegian Crowns, an increase of about 1/2 million Crowns. This increase was particularly welcome, as the Society has been forced to expand its budget for various reasons, and is now in a position to enter the new year with a balance.

Clergymen Among Seal-hunters and Fishermen.

Thousends of Norwegians are absent from their homes for long periods in order to earn their living by seal-hunting and fishing. So that they shall not be deprived of the ministry of the Church during their absence, it is not unusual for Norwegian clergymen to accompany them on the sealing boats or to the bases of the fishing fleets. Thus Rev. Norderval of Ålesund is to sail on a seal-hunter's boat to a large hunting ground where many seal-hunters will be assembled, and to stay there a month. Bishop Indrebø, Bergen, is also thinking of sending a clergymen to Greenland for some months as a lot of Norwegian fishermen have their summer fishing bases there.

The Church Celebrates Armistice Day.

The 10th anniversary of Norway's liberation, the 8th of May, falls on a Sunday and on this day the Church will celebrate the peace by special church services.

New Deaf School to be Built on Madagascar.

A modern school for 60 deaf people to cost 1,4 million Crowns is at present under construction at Antsirabe on Madagascar. All the expenses for building and equipping the school will be paid by the French authorities and they have likewise offered to pay the working expenses. But the title is to belong to the Norwegian Missionary Society which is doing a lot of work on Madagascar. This must be considered in the light of the outstanding work that the mission has been doing for many years, and in recognition of this work the French High Commissioner has requested the leaders to extend their work with the aid of funds supplied by the State. While the school is under construction the leader of the work among the deaf, Rev. Erik Borgenvik, who is to continue as headmaster of the new school, has received a Government grant from the French authorities to study similar work in seven European countries.

SWEDEN

Shortened Theological Training to Begin this Autumn.

The Swedish Minister of Church Affairs has now asked Parliament for an appropriation to establish a short training course for the ministry of the Swedish National Church. The number of participants in the course which is to begin in the autumn of 1955 is put at about 40, and the course is to comprise all the usual theological subjects, corresponding to the first part of the

University course for a B.D., and also the same course in practical theology followed by ordinary divinity students.

The reason for this is the fact that the Swedish National Church is already feeling the lack of trained clergymen, and the small number of divinity students at the faculties will mean that within the next five years there will be a shortage of at least 350 clergymen, unless special measures are taken.

It is expected that a number of teachers who after having begun their theological studies abandonned them will make use of the new short course and then take orders.

As a matter of fact the recently published survey of the number of students at the University of Uppsala shows an increase for the spring term of 1955 in the number of divinity students for the first time in several years.

Dr. Mott's Memory Honoured.

The YMCA and the Swedish Methodist Church have held a joint commemorative service for Dr. John R. Mott in Trefaldighets-kyrkan in Stockholm. Among those present at the service were the American Embassy's Counsellor Mr. Abbot, Minister Ståhle from the Nobel Foundation, and Marshall Birger Ekeberg. The chief speeches were made by the YMCA-secretary Brunkert and the Scandinavian Methodist bishop, Odd Hagen. On both sides of the altar stood scouts holding the American and the Swedish flags.

The Methodist Church Appoints Inter-Scandinavian Mission-Secretary.

The close co-operation between the Methodist churches in Scandinavia has led to a joint meeting of mission-workers in various countries recently held at Örebro. A number of problems in present-day mission work were discussed, and the conference agreed to suggest the creation of a new post as joint missionary secretary for all the Scandinavian countries.

Outstanding Churchmen of Moral Re-Armament.

Several outstanding churchmen in Sweden have made very favourable statements on MRA in connection with the large MRA-conference in London in which they have taken part.

Bishop Bengt Jonzon, Luleå, pointed out that it was a serious weakness in the work of the Church that it had had so little contact with the working classes, especially at a time when public affairs are gradually being withdrawn from Christian influence, and when the Church is in danger of forgetting that Christianity is not merely concerned with the salvation of souls, but that it must also influence everyday life and social problems. Here MRA can bring about a change which will enable us to find the right answers and the right methods.

Bishop Arvid Runestam, Karlstad, maintains that all the churches of Europe are in distress, not because of external conditions, but because doubt, despondency and hopelessness with regard to the future have claimed them. MRA shows the way by helping man to live a real life and obtain the divine guidance we all need.

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Mr. Ruben Swedberg, member of the Parliament, mentions the considerable results he has seen in Sweden that have been attained through MRA's work. Through MRA, people as well as situations have been changed.

New Laymen-Service in the Swedish National Church.

The wording of the declaration adopted by the Bishops' Conference with regard to the establishment of a new special layman's service in the Swedish National Church (cf. CN No. 3) has now been published. The work is chiefly designed for women parish workers who are to be specially trained for it.

Their main task will be spiritual guidance, evangelization, teaching, and work among young people and children. Of the spiritual guidance the declaration says that its chief aim is to reach people with whom the Church has not been able to get into contact through its clergymen, especially in the rapidly expanding congregations in the towns. With regard to the teaching to be done the chief emphasis is placed on work in study groups, and it is suggested that the lay-workers should take part in the confirmation classes, and keep in touch with the parents of the confirmands. Training for this work will be of a practical as well as a theoretical nature. The theoretical training should normally be either that leading to a B.D. or the University course for training teachers of religion, whereas the practical training is to be given in one year courses specially arranged for this purpose.

It is suggested that the work may be carried out either by full-time or part-time assistants according to the needs of the various parishes, but a part-time assistant would normally receive no salary, so that it would be impossible to require the thorough training demanded of the full-time assistants. The latter are to be installed in their "posts", which the Bishops' Conference prefers to call their "service", by the bishop of the diocese in question, and the local clergyman is to be their superior.

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